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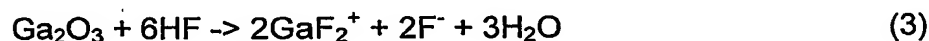
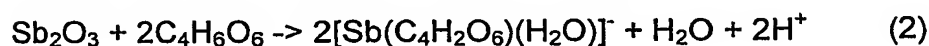
Field of the invention

The present invention relates to wet acid etchants for wet acid etching of AlGaInAsSb material, a process for wet acid etching of AlGaInAsSb structures, and a semiconductor structure prepared by wet acid etching of AlGaInAsSb material.

Background of the invention

A. Li, C. Lin and Y. Zheng, "Chemical etching liquid system for preparing gallium antimonide semiconductor device", CN A 1328175 used an etchant comprising tartaric acid ($C_4H_6O_6$) with H_2O_2 and HF to etch GaSb-based devices.

P.S. Gladkov et al. "Study of a new chemical etchant for GaSb (100) and (111) substrate preparation for epitaxial growth", pp. 2413-17, Journal of Electrochemical Society, Vol. 142, No. 7 (1995) used an etchant composed of aqueous tartaric acid, H_2O_2 , and HF for surface preparation of plain GaSb material. They suggested the following reactions to take place within the resulting solution:



The complex tartaric acid dissolves the antimony oxide, while the hydrofluoric acid dissolves the gallium oxide.

This is in contrast to the Gallium citrate formation observed by G.E. Hawes et al. "Solid and Solution State NMR Spectra and the Structure of the Gallium Citrate Complex $(NH_4)_3[Ga(C_6H_5O_7)_2] \cdot 4H_2O$ ", pp.1005-1011, European Journal of Inorganic Chemistry (2001), in which Ga reacts with citrate.

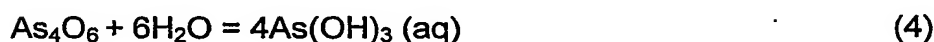
From G.C. Desalvo et al. "Citric acid etching of $GaAs_{1-x}Sb_x$, $Al_{0.5}Ga_{0.5}Sb$, and InAs for Heterostructure Device Fabrication", pp. 3526-31, Journal of Electrochemical Society, Vol. 141, No. 12 (1994) it is known to use an etchant based on citric acid and H_2O_2 for pattern formation in $Ga_{0.5}Al_{0.5}Sb$ and $GaAs_{1-x}Sb_x$ material based devices. For GaAs they reported an etch rate of up to $0.3 \mu m/min$, whereas for

both GaSb and $\text{Ga}_{0.5}\text{Al}_{0.5}\text{Sb}$ etch rates of less than 10 Å/min were reported in the same solution (9.1 and 0.23 Å/min, respectively).

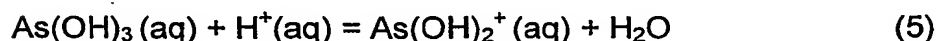
From H.A. Szymanski et al. "Infrared and Raman studies of arsenic compounds", pp. 297-304, Applied Spectroscopy, Vol. 22, No. 4 (1968) we know that arsenic
 5 oxides are soluble in water (but not necessarily in acids under bias conditions, according to X. Li et al. "Arsenic Oxide Micro crystals in Anodically Processed GaAs", pp. 1740-1746, Journal of Electrochemical Society, Vol. 147, No. 5 (2000)).

In the present invention no bias conditions were applied, and therefore we expect
 10 the arsenic oxide to be soluble by water reaction alone.

According to Per Kofstad "Inorganic Chemistry. An introduction to the chemistry of the elements", 467 pages (Norwegian), Tano A.S., Oslo (1987), solid As(III) oxide reacts with water in a wet environment:

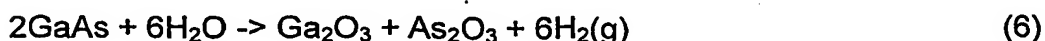


15 Thus, As_2O_3 (or As_4O_6) could form $\text{As}(\text{OH})_3$ (or H_3AsO_3) which is then in solution without HF interfering. In an acidic solution, the following reaction would apply:



Kofstad also reports that Sb in oxidation state +III is little soluble in water.

R.D. Twisten et al. "Microstructure and interface properties of laterally oxidized
 20 $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{As}$ ", pp. 55-61, SPIE, Vol. 3003 (1997) found remaining oxides of $(\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x})_2\text{O}_3$, corresponding to Ga_2O_3 in case of GaAs, under oxidation of $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{As}$ in wet N_2 . This suggests that water alone does not dissolve the Ga oxide as also observed by others (M. J. Howes and D.V. Morgan, "Etching and Surface Preparation of GaAs for Device Fabrication", pp. 119-160, Gallium Arsenide:
 25 Materials, Devices and Circuits, John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 1985). It also suggests that water can react with GaAs to form the oxide:



The formation of hydrogen would form small gas bubbles if the reaction rate was high.

According to H. Hashimoto et al. "Optical and structural characteristics of Al_2O_3 films deposited by the reactive ionised cluster beam method", pp. 241-244, Journal of Applied Physics, Vol. 63, no. 1, (1998) deposited Al_2O_3 films were found to be etched by HF, but with an etch rate dependent upon deposition parameters of the Reactive Ionised Cluster Beam method. By varying the deposition parameters, the refractive index of the films could be changed (by changing the Al/oxygen ratio of the oxide). This in turn varied the etch rate of the materials with higher etch rate for lower refractive index, indicating that reduced oxygen content reduces etch rate.

M. Ishida et al. "A new etching method for single-crystal Al_2O_3 film on Si using Si ion implantation", pp. 340-4, Sensors and Actuators A (Physical), Vol. A53, no. 1-3, (1996) observed that HF etched Al_2O_3 with higher rate if Si was incorporated into the material.

S. Ootomo et al. reported in "Properties of as-grown, chemically treated and thermally oxidized surfaces of AlGaIn/GaN heterostructure", pp. 934-7, Proceedings of International Workshop on Nitride Semiconductors, Nagoya, Japan, (2000) that a blend of Al_2O_3 and Ga_2O_3 was etched by pure HF, but left F-related impurities.

This suggests to us that the part reaction of aluminium oxide removal will increase with HF concentration in the etchants of the present invention.. This means that the etch rate is also dependent on the Al-concentration in the material that is etched.

J.H. Kim et al. "Selective etching of AlGaAs/GaAs structures using the solutions of citric acid/ H_2O_2 and de-ionized H_2O /buffered oxide etch", pp. 558-60, Journal of Vacuum Science Technology, Vol. B16 (1998) observed some etching of AlGaAs by citric acid/ H_2O_2 . They observed that the etch rate increased with lower Al content and/or with reduced citric acid/ H_2O_2 volume ratio. This means that an increased amount of H_2O_2 had to be present in order to reduce the Al oxide at increased Al content. It is therefore probable that the H_2O_2 actually reacts with Al_2O_3 and dissolves this at high concentrations of H_2O_2 and low concentrations of

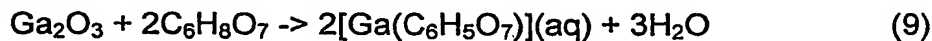
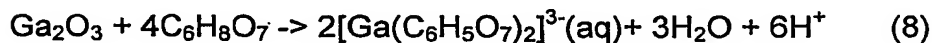
Al. According to P. Kofstad (1987), H_2O_2 can act as a reduction agent. In etching experiments with $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$, the Al content may be above what can be expected to be soluble at a high etch rate with H_2O_2 being the only reduction agent. We have introduced HF into our etchant in an attempt to increase the solubility of Al oxide during etch of $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$.

In contradiction to equation (6) suggested by Twesten et al., the etchants according to the present invention does not give noticeable hydrogen formation during GaAs etch. The reaction of GaAs with water is therefore less important for the oxidation of GaAs in our etchants.

We propose that in our case H_2O_2 could react with GaAs causing the formation of Ga and As oxides:



Earlier interpretation of etching experiments on GaSb by P.S.Gladkov et al. does not explain our findings. According to the results of our etching experiments, the Gallium oxide can also be dissolved through some other reaction than equation (3). From etching of GaAs in citric acid/hydrogen peroxide, we have found that a reaction for the solution of Ga_2O_3 could be :



with citric acid for formation of Gallium citrate complexes.

For the other organic acids in the present invention, our etch rates suggests that similar chemical reactions will happen during etch with the other organic acids.

The purpose of the etchants of the present invention is to produce structures in GaSb-based materials with different content of Al, Ga, In, Sb and As. These structures are among others utilized in semiconductor lasers. In such a laser, it is necessary to remove (etch) layers of $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ in designated areas during processing, in order to define an optical wave guide and electrical injection area. In general, when producing microstructures based on III-V semiconductors, it

is necessary to be able to etch the materials. The materials etched by the present invention, are based on GaSb and similar materials with different content of Al, Ga, In, Sb and As. Conventionally, these materials have been etched with a more expensive dry-etching technique (gas), also referred to as Reactive Ion Etch (RIE), as it has been difficult to find a good wet etchant. It is assumed that difficulties with the etching of these materials, is the main reason for the small use of this material technology beyond lab scale.

The purpose of the present invention is to utilize a mixture of two or more acids and an oxidizing agent in order to produce novel, convenient etchants for such a wet etching process.

The primary object of the present invention is to provide etchants for a new and cost-efficient process for etching of semiconductor structures composed of one or more layers or parts of $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$. The importance of these structures in economical views is high as they can be used in a variety of semiconductor photonic devices such as micro lasers and waveguides. AlGaInAsSb-based semiconductor lasers seem to have a promising future as they show high output-power, room-temperature emission, and emit in a range of mid-IR wavelengths. By utilizing wet chemical etching to pattern these structures, cheaper lasers can be made as the need for expensive dry etching equipment (as RIE) can be eliminated. Such cost reduction in manufacturing of semiconductor lasers may eventually lead to a wider use of the lasers. The present invention shows the advantage of organic acids with an oxidizing agent and HF as an etchant for AlGaInAsSb-based materials.

Summary of the invention

In one aspect the present invention relates to a wet acid etchant for wet acid etching of intrinsic, n-doped or p-doped $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$, comprising:

- a) organic acid;
- b) oxidizing agent; and
- c) hydrofluoric acid.

In the wet acid etchant, the organic acid may be neat or a mixture, and selected from citric acid, lactic acid, acetic acid and tartaric acid.

In one embodiment of the present invention, when $z = 0$, the organic acid is selected from citric acid, lactic acid and acetic acid.

- 5 The oxidizing agent may be hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2), sodiumhypochlorite ($NaOCl$), ozone (O_3) or another oxide-forming chemical.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the wet acid etchant comprises:

- a) up to 90 wt-% of organic acid,
- b) up to 50 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- 10 c) up to 25 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the wet acid etchant comprises:

- a) up to 75 wt-% of organic acid,
- 15 b) up to 25 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- c) up to 15 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

- 20 In an even further embodiment of the present invention, the wet acid etchant comprises:

- a) up to 60 wt-% of organic acid,
- b) up to 15 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- c) up to 10 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

- 25 all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

In another aspect, the present invention relates to a process for wet acid etching of intrinsic, n-doped or p-doped $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$, comprising contacting an $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ material with a wet acid etchant comprising:

- a) organic acid;
- b) oxidizing agent, and
- c) hydrofluoric acid.

5 In a further embodiment of the process of the present invention, the organic acid is neat or a mixture.

In the process of the present invention, the organic acid may be selected from citric acid, lactic acid, acetic acid and tartaric acid.

When $z = 0$, the process of the present invention may be conducted with organic acid selected from citric acid, lactic acid and acetic acid.

10 The process of the present invention may be conducted with the oxidizing agent selected from hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2), sodiumhypochlorite ($NaOCl$), ozone (O_3) or another oxide-forming chemical.

In one embodiment the process may be conducted with a wet etchant comprising:

- a) up to 90 wt-% of organic acid,
- 15 b) up to 50 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- c) up to 25 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

20 In another embodiment the process may be conducted with a wet etchant comprising:

- a) up to 75 wt-% of organic acid,
- b) up to 25 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- c) up to 15 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

25 all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

In an even further embodiment the process may be conducted with a wet etchant comprising:

- a) up to 60 wt-% of organic acid,
- b) up to 15 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- 30 c) up to 10 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

In the process of the present invention, the $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ semiconductor surface or structure may be patterned with a masking layer prior to the contact
 5 with the etchant. The masking material may be selected from a photo resist, oxides, nitrides, carbides, diamond-film, semiconductors or metals.

In the process of the present invention, one or more cap layer(s) may be applied on the $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ semiconductor surface or structure so that patterning of said semiconductor may be achieved without any contact (reaction) between
 10 the surface of the $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ semiconductor and the masking material. The cap layer may be GaSb, InSb, GaAs, InAs, GaInSb, GaInAs, InAsSb, GaAsSb, GaInAsSb or other non-oxidizing material.

The process of the present invention may be conducted in a two-step manner, wherein the $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ semiconductor surface or structure is exposed to
 15 H_2O_2 , and the organic acid and hydrofluoric acid in two separate steps.

In a further aspect, the present invention relates to a semiconductor structure prepared by wet acid etching of $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$, by contacting a semiconductor comprising $Al_{1-x-z}Ga_xIn_zAs_{1-y}Sb_y$ material with a wet acid etchant comprising:

- 20 a) organic acid;
 b) oxidizing agent; and
 c) hydrofluoric acid.

In the whole or parts of the semiconductor material(s) the structure is composed of, may be n-doped with Tellurium or other n-dopant, or p-doped with Beryllium or
 25 other p-dopant.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the etched material is part of a laser, Light-Emitting-Diode(LED), photodetector or optical waveguide structure.

The laser or optical waveguide structure, of which the etched material of the present invention is a part, may be a ridge.

The laser, of which the etched material of the present invention is a part, may be a Fabry Perot laser, Distributed Feedback/Reflector Laser (DFB/DBR) or Interferometric laser (as Y-laser or alike).

In another embodiment of the present invention, the etched material of the semiconductor may be part of a Vertical-Cavity Surface-Emitting Laser (VCSEL).

In a further embodiment of the present invention, the etched material of the semiconductor may be part of a photonic crystal structure as Photonic Crystal Distributed Feedback Laser or alike.

In an even further embodiment of the present invention, the etched material of the semiconductor may be part of an optical sensor.

In a further embodiment, the etchant is mixed with the composition in Figure 7 or 8 shown to give a uniform isotropic etch across the etched material.

The scope of the invention shall be considered to be covered by the appended independent claims.

15 **Brief description of the Figures**

Figure 1 shows SEM images of etch profiles and depths near the photoresist edge for different materials.

Figure 2 shows etch of $\text{Al}_{0.85}\text{Ga}_{0.15}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb), with low contents of HF. Selectivity of AlGaAsSb over the GaSb cap can be seen (0.3 vol % HF in figure 9).

Figure 3 shows etch rates of $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) for acetic, lactic and citric acid based etchants as a function of H_2O_2 content (see table 2).

Figure 4 shows etch rates of $\text{Al}_{0.85}\text{Ga}_{0.15}\text{As}_{0.06}\text{Sb}_{0.94}$ with etchants containing citric and tartaric acid as shown in table 4.

Figure 5 shows comparison of etch rates for $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ and $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) with the lactic acid based etchant (see table 5).

Figure 6 shows etch rates of GaAs and GaSb substrates for citric acid and tartaric acid based etchants as shown in table 1.

Figure 7 shows etch rates from table 3 showing uniform etch across $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) sample with adjusted concentrations of H_2O_2 in etchant.

Figure 8 shows etch rates of table 7 which suggests increased etch uniformity from the lactic acid based etchant when adding In to $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb).

Figure 9 shows etch selectivity of $\text{Al}_{0.85}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) versus the GaSb cap (see table 6). Lowering of the HF concentration, reduces the etch rate of GaSb cap more than for $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$.

Figure 10 shows XPS spectra of $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) after etch with etchant with 0.18 M HF

Figure 11 shows XPS spectra of $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) after etch with etchant with 0.9 M HF

Figure 12 shows XPS spectra of $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) after etch with etchant with 0.18 M HF. Al-peak in spectrum shows residue Al oxide on the remaining GaSb substrate after etch.

Figure 13 shows XPS spectra of $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) after etch with etchant with 0.9 M HF. No Al-peak from the remaining GaSb substrate can be seen, but some As and O signal is present (see figure 11).

Detailed description of the invention.

The present invention is described with basis in the following, non-limiting examples. The patent is intended to cover all possible variations and adjustments, which may be made, based on the appended claims.

Examples

Solutions of citric acid, tartaric acid, lactic acid and acetic acid with H_2O_2 and HF, were made to etch patterns into GaAs, GaSb, AlGaAsSb and AlGaInAsSb . The AlGaAsSb and AlGaInAsSb materials had been grown onto GaSb substrates using Molecular Beam Epitaxy (MBE). Broad stripes of photoresist (PR) coating were applied onto the samples using spin-off, contact exposure, and developer.

Etching was then carried out on the different samples for up to one minute (with stirring). The resulting etch rates on AlGaAsSb (~90% Al), AlInGaAsSb (~8% In), GaSb and GaAs are shown in graphical form in figures 3-9 and in numerical form in tables 1-7. Figure 1 shows some etch profiles in different materials, revealing isotropic etching of GaSb and AlGaAsSb (figure 1a and 1b, respectively) and anisotropic etching of GaAs (figure 1c). The bending of the photoresist seen in figure 1d is associated with a small beak of reaction products that has appeared between the photoresist and the AlGaAsSb material beneath. We found that formation of a beak could be suppressed by using a cap material as shown in figure 1b (GaSb cap).

HF in etchants [Abs.Vol %]	Tartaric acid etchant on GaAs [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Tartaric acid etchant on GaSb [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Citric acid etchant on GaAs [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Citric acid etchant on GaSb [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]
0	0.3	0	0.38	0
0.3	0.74	5.5	0.93	4.51
1	0.79	8.45	0.99	7.5
1.6	0.86	7.45	1.08	6.4

Table 1. Etch rates from etch on GaAs and GaSb substrates by citric and tartaric acid based etchants with 100 ml 2.5 M organic acid, 20 ml 9.8 M H_2O_2 and 0-5 ml 22.6 M HF

H_2O_2 in etchant [Abs.Vol %]	Acetic acid based etch [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Lactic acid based etch [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Citric acid based etch [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]
0.35	2.96	2.27	2.41
0.7	5.89	3.78	2.54
2.6	8.48	8.77	4.75
4.8	5.6	3.08	5.92

Table 2. Etch rates from etch on $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.1}\text{AsSb}$ with 100 ml 2.5 M organic acid, 1.25-20 ml 9.8 M H_2O_2 and 5 ml 22.6 M HF.

H_2O_2 in etchant [Abs.Vol %]	Sample centre etch rate [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Sample edge etch rate [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Change centre vs. edge, etch type*
0.35	2.41	2.16	+12%, Anisotropic
0.7	2.54	3.56	-29%, Anisotropic
2.6	4.75	6.40	-26%, Isotropic
4.8	5.92	5.6	+6%, Isotropic

Table 3. Uniformity of etch rate for etch on $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.1}\text{AsSb}$ with 100 ml 2.5 M citric acid, 1.25-20 ml 9.8 M H_2O_2 and 5 ml 22.6 M HF.

*[Change centre vs. edge]=[Etch rate at sample centre]/[Etch rate at sample edge]-1

HF in etchants [Abs.Vol %]	Citric acid etchant [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Tartaric acid etchant [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]
0.3	2.74	3.52
1	5.37	6.4
1.6	7.26	9

Table 4. Etch rates from etch on $\text{Al}_{0.85}\text{Ga}_{0.15}\text{As}_{0.06}\text{Sb}_{0.94}$ by citric and tartaric acid based etchants with 100 ml 2.5 M organic acid, 20 ml 9.8 M H_2O_2 and 1-5 ml 22.6 M HF

H_2O_2 in etchant [Abs.Vol %]	Lactic acid etch on AlGaAsSb [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Lactic acid etch on AlInGaAsSb [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]
0.35	2.15	2.27
0.7	3.04	3.78
2.6	7.63	8.77
4.8	3.00	3.08

5 Table 5. Comparison between etch on $\text{Al}_{0.9}\text{Ga}_{0.1}\text{AsSb}$ and $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.1}\text{AsSb}$ with 100 ml 2.5 M Lactic acid, 1.25-20 ml 9.8 M H_2O_2 and 5 ml 22.6 M HF.

HF in etchants [Abs.Vol %]	Etch rate on AlGaAsSb [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Etch rate on GaSb cap [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Selectivity of AlGaAsSb over GaSb cap
0.3	2.74	1.54	1.78
1	5.37	4.98	1.08
1.6	7.26	6.78	1.07

Table 6. Selectivity in etch of MBE grown GaSb cap over $\text{Al}_{0.85}\text{Ga}_{0.15}\text{As}_{0.06}\text{Sb}_{0.94}$ with 100 ml 2.5 M citric acid, 20 ml 9.8 M H_2O_2 and 1-5 ml 22.6 M HF.

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H_2O_2 in etchant [Abs. Vol %]	Etch rate at AlGaAsSb centre [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Etch rate at AlGaAsSb edge [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Change centre vs. edge*	Etch rate at AlInGaAsSb centre [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Etch rate at AlInGaAsSb edge [$\mu\text{m}/\text{min}$]	Change centre vs. edge*
0.35	2.15	2.24	-4%	2.27	3.10	-27%
0.7	3.04	3.70	-18%	3.78	3.72	+1%
2.6	7.63	8.98	-15%	8.77	8.64	+2%
4.8	3.00	9.68	-69%	3.08	5.2	-41%

Table 7. Comparison between etch uniformity on $\text{Al}_{0.9}\text{Ga}_{0.1}\text{AsSb}$ and $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.1}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) with 100 ml 2.5 M lactic acid, 1.25-20 ml 9.8 M H_2O_2 and 5 ml 22.6 M HF.

*[Change centre vs. edge]=[Etch rate at sample centre]/[Etch rate at sample edge]-1

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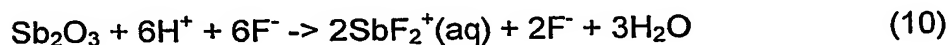
It can be seen from table 5 that replacing of 8% the Al with In increases all etch rates.

It can be seen from table 7 that the resulting surface after etch shows better etch uniformity for $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.1}\text{AsSb}$ than for $\text{Al}_{0.9}\text{Ga}_{0.1}\text{AsSb}$.

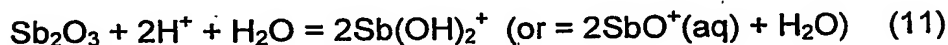
It was found that the etchants with citric acid and lactic acid could be used for highly uniform etching of AlGaInAsSb (figures 7 and 8) and fairly good uniform etching of AlGaAsSb (figure 8). Selectivity of AlGaAsSb over GaSb could be obtained by reducing HF concentration in the etchant (see figure 2). These two results are important in order to utilize the etchants for industrial applications.

From figure 6 and table 1, it is seen that the organic acid/ H_2O_2 solutions without HF etches GaAs but not GaSb at an observable rate. This suggests that the formed Sb oxide (Sb_2O_3) (see equation 1, page 1) is not significantly dissolved by any of the organic acids, which is in contrast to the chemical equations proposed by P.S.Gladkov et al. (1995). All As oxides are highly soluble in water (M. J. Howes and D.V. Morgan (1985)), whereas Sb oxides are little soluble in water (P. Kofstad (1987)).

Since GaSb is etched by the solution containing HF, the following reaction could apply:



Since $\text{HF}(\text{aq})$ is a weak acid, the direct reaction with H^+ :



is probably less important. These equations can be seen to explain a process in which HF is speeding up the dissolution of Sb-oxides into the etchant.

Since the Sb oxide is little soluble in water we can probably disregard any influence of such reactions.

The complex acid etches of the GaSb based semiconductors gave isotropic and smooth surfaces (see figure 1a-b) for a range of ingredient concentrations. At low H_2O_2 concentration in the etchant, however, most GaSb -based materials showed surface roughness and/or anisotropic etching (see figure 3 and 5). For all etchants, some variation of etch rate was observed across the specimens. Generally, it was

observed for all the specimens that the etch rate at the edge of the specimen was different from the etch rate at the middle of the specimen. Local variations of etch rates were also observed and were probably due to diffusion limited reactions: Near PR edges, the etching rate was generally lower than for the open areas far from the PR. The variations could be eliminated or reduced by adjusting the composition of the etchant, as shown in figure 7 and 8, giving an isotropic etch with uniform etch rate and smooth surfaces.

Figure 4 and 6 show that the etch rates on GaSb and AlGaAsSb increase with increasing HF content in the tartaric and citric acid based etchants. The small drop in etch rate of GaSb (figure 6) for the highest concentration of HF indicates a second diffusion-limited reaction in our etchants. This might be explained via the increased reaction rates for HF-related reactions with increased HF concentration. At high reaction rates, reaction products may not have time to diffuse away, causing reduced etch rates. At even higher HF concentrations, concentration gradients will be reduced, contributing to less diffusion of products and thereby a further reduction in the etch rate.

Our results show that the organic acid based etchant can have good uniformity during etch of AlGaAsSb and AlInGaAsSb materials, resulting in good planarity and smooth surfaces. Results also show highly uniform etch regions of some etchants (figure 7 and 8). This can indicate that citric acid and lactic acid are favorable over acetic acid and tartaric acid for etching AlInGaAsSb. We also showed that increased selectivity of AlGaAsSb over the GaSb cap can be obtained by adjusting the HF composition of the etchant (figure 9).

X-Ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS)

To examine surface composition of AlGaAsSb after etch, x-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) experiments were carried out. Pieces of the same material without PR were etched and XPS spectra collected from the samples. XPS spectra from the characterization of etched AlGaAsSb is shown in figure 10-13.

In order to carry out these XPS examinations, two specimens of a 2 μm thick $\text{Al}_{0.85}\text{Ga}_{0.15}\text{As}_{0.06}\text{Sb}_{0.94}$ epilayer on a GaSb substrate were etched for one minute in an etchant with 2.5 M citric acid, 9.8 M H_2O_2 and HF (100:20:x), one solution with

0.18 M HF ($x=1$) and one with 0.9 M HF ($x=5$, see figure 4 or table 4 for etch rates). This was supposed to remove the 2 μm thick AlGaAsSb epilayer, so that only the GaSb along with any surface oxides would be present.

5 XPS measurements revealed residue Al on/near the surface of the etched specimen with etchant containing little HF (0.18 M) (see figure 12). This specimen also showed oxygen peaks, but very little Ga-signal, indicating an Al-containing oxide remaining on the surface. This was not the case when etching with the etchant containing more HF (0.9 M). This specimen showed no Al 2p peak (figure 13), which indicates that the Al-containing oxide is removed on/near the surface.
10 The low HF-containing etchant might not have removed all of the epilayer material, probably due to a low dissolution rate of the Al-oxide which leaves Al-containing residues.

Comparing figure 4 and 6, we can see that the etch rate of AlGaAsSb (figure 4) can increase to above that of the GaSb substrate (figure 6) when increasing the
15 HF concentration in the etchant. This means that the etch rate of As- or Al-oxide increase with HF concentration to a level above that of Ga- and/or Sb-oxide. The As 3d peak (figure 10 and 11) was present in both specimens, which indicates that there is some As-containing residue left on both surfaces. By also considering the 85% Al and 6% As content of the AlGaAsSb material, the Al oxide must be much
20 more soluble than the As oxide for the high HF-containing etchant (with 0.9 M HF, i.e. 1.6 Vol % HF). We can therefore conclude that the reaction with HF is faster for Al than for Ga, meaning that the Ga-citrate formation proposed in equation (8) and (9) must be important for the present invention.

The patent is intended to cover all possible variations and adjustments which may
25 appear obvious for a person skilled in the art after reading this specification.



Patent Claims

1. A wet acid etchant for wet acid etching of intrinsic, n-doped or p-doped $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$, comprising:
 - a) organic acid;
 - 5 b) oxidizing agent; and
 - c) hydrofluoric acid.
2. The wet acid etchant according to claim 1, wherein the organic acid is neat or a mixture.
3. The wet acid etchant according to claim 1, wherein the organic acid is
 - 10 selected from citric acid, lactic acid, acetic acid and tartaric acid.
4. The wet acid etchant according to claim 1, wherein when $z = 0$, the organic acid is selected from citric acid, lactic acid and acetic acid.
5. The wet acid etchant according to claim 1, wherein the oxidizing agent is hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2).
- 15 6. The wet acid etchant according to claim 1, wherein the oxidizing agent is an oxide-forming chemical, e.g. NaOCl or Ozone.
7. The wet acid etchant according to claim 1, wherein the wet etchant comprises:
 - a) up to 90 wt-% of organic acid,
 - 20 b) up to 50 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
 - c) up to 25 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.
8. The wet acid etchant according to claim 6, wherein the wet acid etchant
 - 25 comprises:
 - a) up to 75 wt-% of organic acid,
 - b) up to 25 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
 - c) up to 15 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

9. The wet acid etchant according to claim 6, wherein the wet acid etchant comprises:

- 5 a) up to 60 wt-% of organic acid,
- b) up to 15 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- c) up to 10 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

10 10. A process for wet acid etching of intrinsic, n-doped or p-doped $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$, comprising contacting an $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ material with a wet acid etchant comprising:

- a) organic acid;
- b) oxidizing agent, and
- 15 c) hydrofluoric acid.

11. The process according to claim 10, wherein the organic acid is neat or a mixture.

12. The process according to claim 10, wherein the organic acid is selected from citric acid, lactic acid, acetic acid and tartaric acid.

20 13. The process according to claim 10, wherein when $z = 0$, the organic acid is selected from citric acid, lactic acid and acetic acid.

14. The process according to claim 10, wherein the oxidizing agent is hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2).

25 15. The process according to claim 10, wherein the oxidizing agent is an oxide-forming chemical, e.g. NaOCl or Ozone.

16. The process according to claim 10, wherein the wet etchant comprises:

- a) up to 90 wt-% of organic acid,
- b) up to 50 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- c) up to 25 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

17. The process according to claim 10, wherein the wet acid etchant comprises:

- a) up to 75 wt-% of organic acid,
- 5 b) up to 25 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- c) up to 15 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

18. The process according to claim 10, wherein the wet acid etchant comprises:

- 10 a) up to 60 wt-% of organic acid,
- b) up to 15 wt-% of oxidizing agent; and
- c) up to 10 wt-% of hydrofluoric acid,

all wt-% are based on the total weight of the composition, the balance is made up by a solvent, preferably water.

15 19. The process according to claim 10, wherein the $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ semiconductor surface or structure is patterned with a masking layer prior to the contact with the etchant.

20 20. The process according to claim 19, wherein the masking material is selected from a photo resist, oxides, nitrides, carbides, diamond-film, semiconductors or metals.

21. The process according to claim 19, wherein one or more cap layer(s) is (are) applied on the $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ semiconductor surface or structure so that patterning of said semiconductor is achieved without any reaction at the interface between the surface of the $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ semiconductor and the
25 masking material.

22. The process according to claim 21, wherein the cap layer is GaSb, InSb, GaAs, InAs, GaInSb, GaInAs, InAsSb, GaAsSb, GaInAsSb or other non-oxidizing material.

23. The process according to claim 10 wherein the $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ semiconductor surface or structure is exposed to H_2O_2 , and the organic acid and hydrofluoric acid in a two step manner.
24. A semiconductor structure prepared by wet acid etching of
 5 $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$, by contacting a semiconductor comprising $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ material with a wet acid etchant comprising:
- a) organic acid;
 - b) oxidizing agent; and
 - 10 c) hydrofluoric acid.
25. A semiconductor structure according to claim 24 wherein the the whole or parts of the $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ semiconductor material(s) the structure is composed of, is n-doped with Tellurium or other n-dopant, or p-doped with Beryllium or other p-dopant.
- 15 26. The semiconductor structure according to claim 25 wherein the etched material is part of a laser, Light-Emitting-Diode(LED), photodetector or optical waveguide structure.
27. The semiconductor structure according to claim 25 wherein the laser or optical waveguide structure is a ridge.
- 20 28. The semiconductor according to claim 26 or 27 wherein the laser is a Fabry Perot laser, Distributed Feedback/Reflector Laser (DFB/DBR) or Interferometric laser (as Y-laser or alike).
29. The semiconductor according to claim 26 wherein the etched material is part of a Vertical-Cavity Surface-Emitting Laser (VCSEL).
- 25 30. The semiconductor according to claim 26 wherein the etched material is part of a photonic crystal structure as Photonic Crystal Distributed Feedback Laser or alike.
31. The semiconductor according to claim 26 wherein the etched material is part of an optical sensor.



Abstract

The present invention relates to a wet acid etchant for wet acid etching of intrinsic, n-doped or p-doped $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$,
 5 a process for wet acid etching of intrinsic, n-doped or p-doped $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$, and a semiconductor structure prepared by wet acid etching of $\text{Al}_{1-x-z}\text{Ga}_x\text{In}_z\text{As}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y$ with $0 < x < 1$, $0 < y < 1$, $0 \leq z < 1$ and $0 < x+z < 1$.



Figures

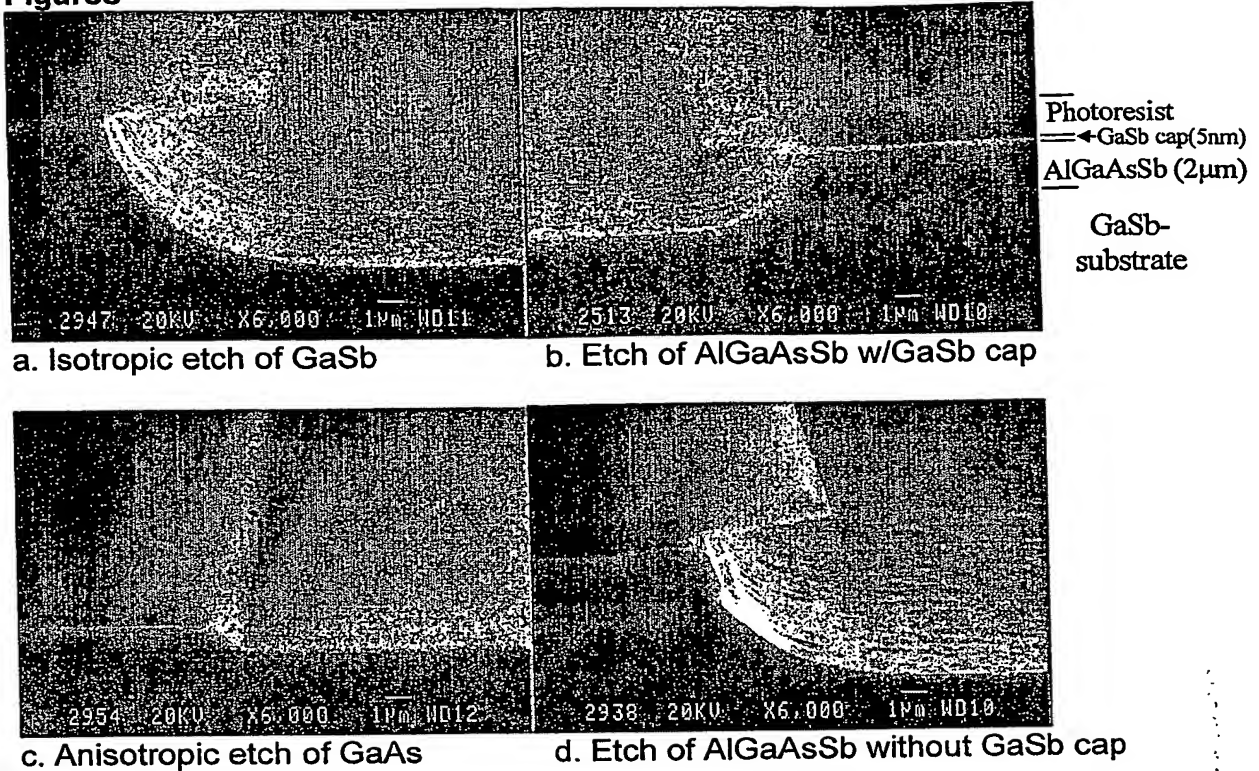


Figure 1: SEM images of etch profiles and depths near the photoresist edge for different materials.

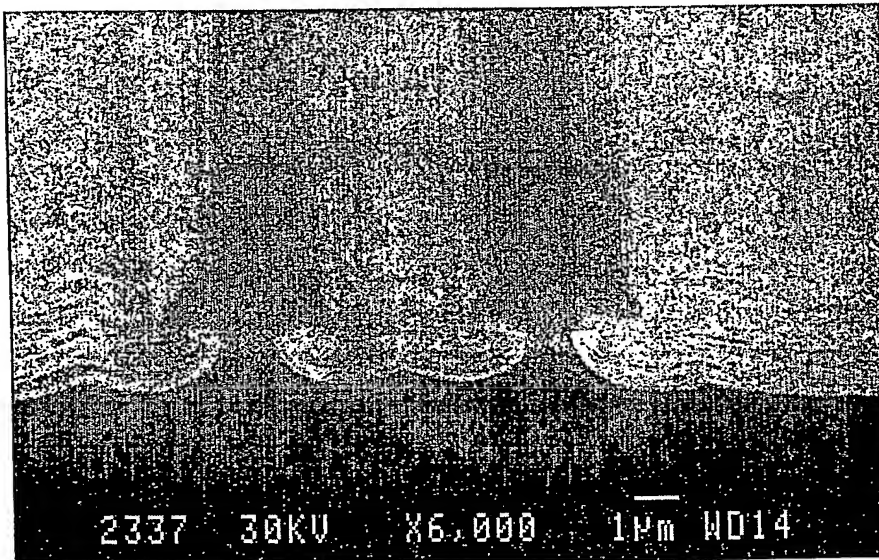


Figure 2. Etch of $\text{Al}_{0.85}\text{Ga}_{0.15}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb), with low contents of HF. Selectivity of AlGaAsSb over the GaSb cap can be seen (0.3 vol% HF in figure 9).



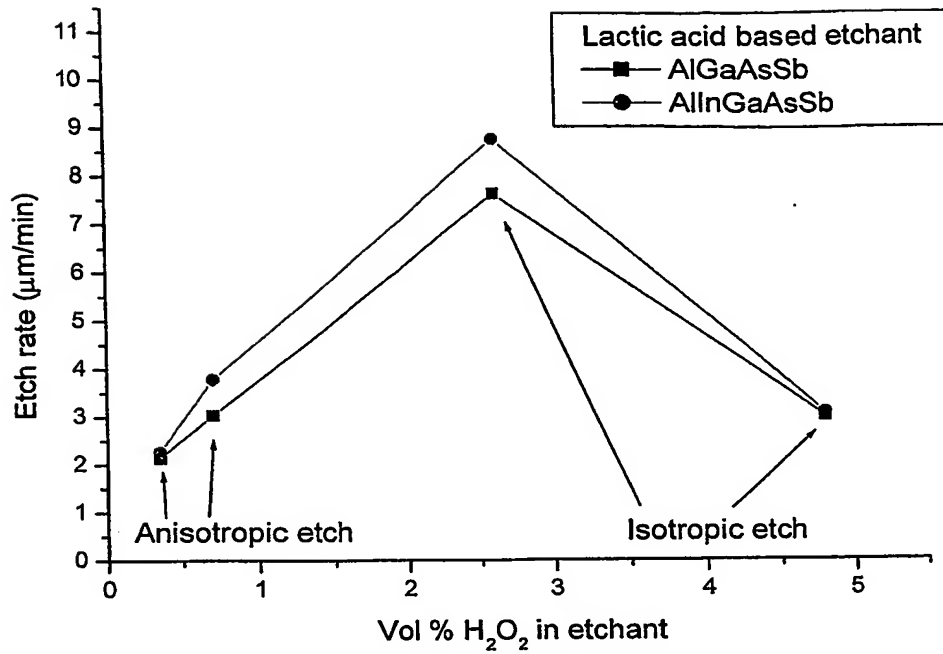
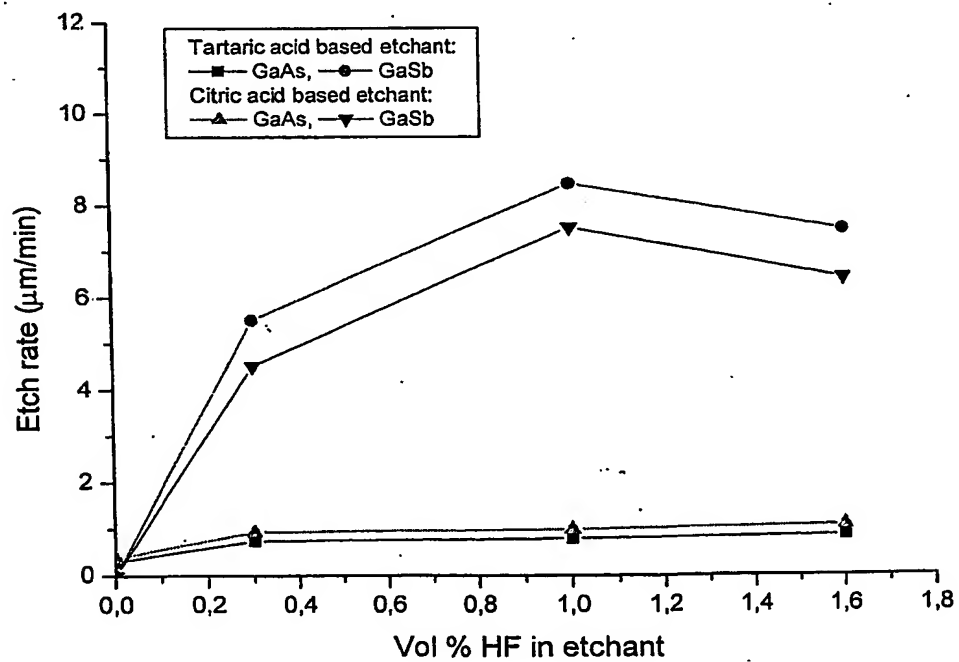


Figure 5. Comparison of etch rates for $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ and $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) with the lactic acid based etchant (see table 5).



5 Figure 6. Etch rates of GaAs and GaSb substrates for citric acid and tartaric acid based etchants as shown in table 1.



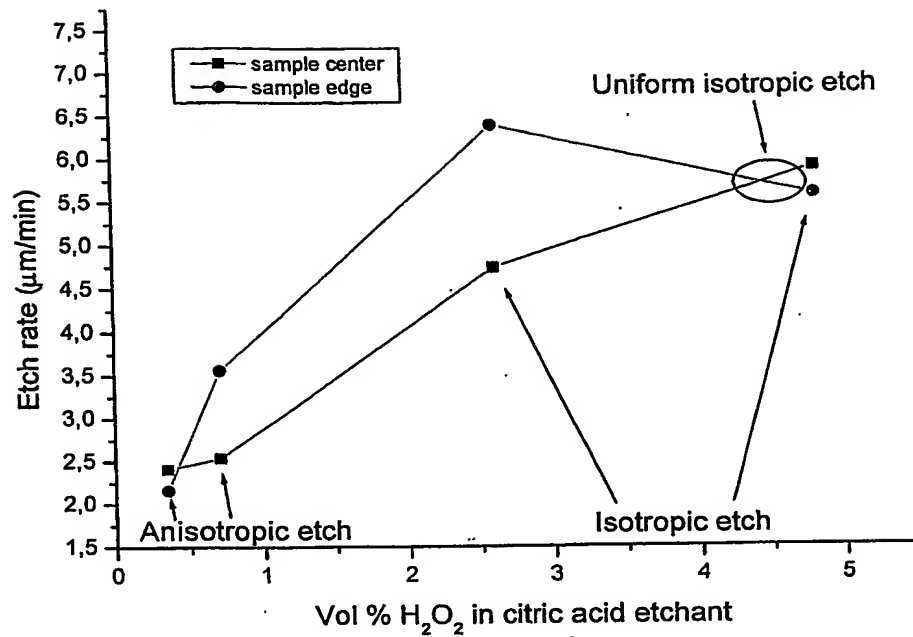


Figure 7. Etch rates from table 3 showing uniform etch across $\text{Al}_{0.82}\text{In}_{0.08}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) sample with adjusted concentrations of H_2O_2 in etchant.

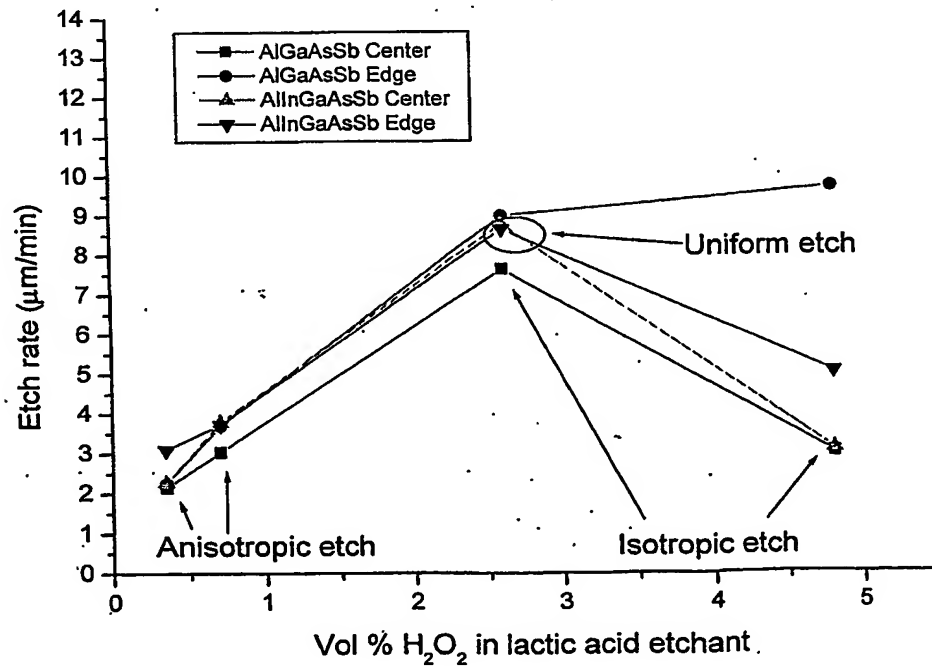
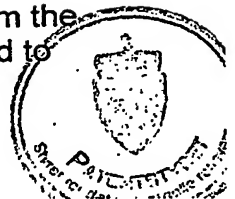


Figure 8. Etch rates of table 7 which suggests increased etch uniformity from the lactic acid based etchant when adding In to $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb).



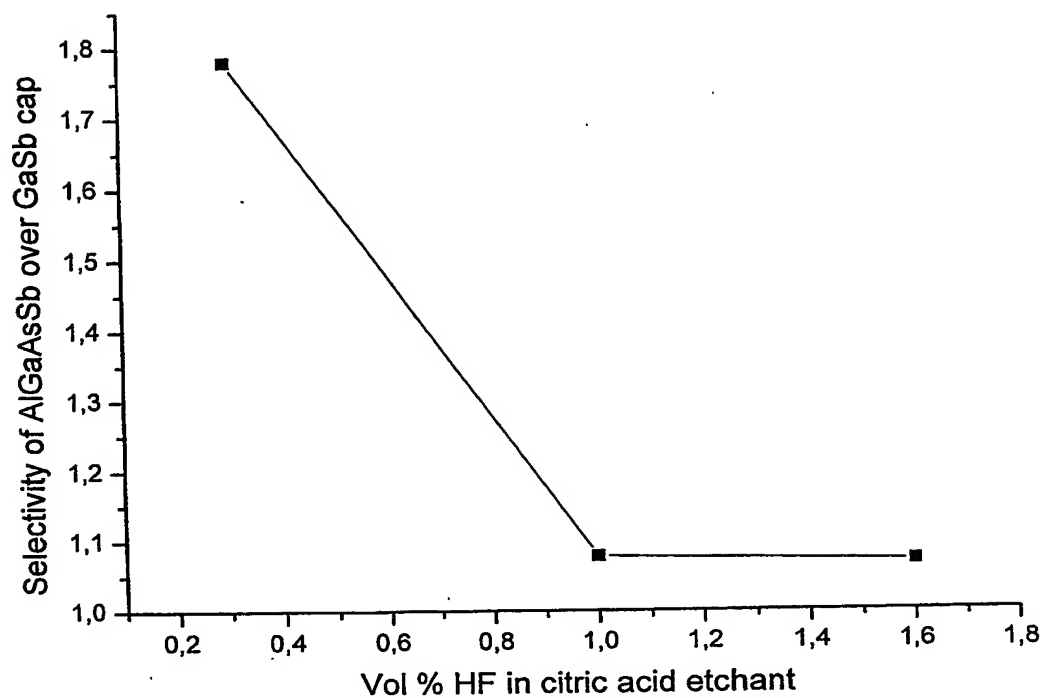


Figure 9. Etch selectivity of $\text{Al}_{0.85}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) versus the GaSb cap (see table 6). Lowering of the HF concentration, reduces the etch rate of GaSb cap more than for $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$.



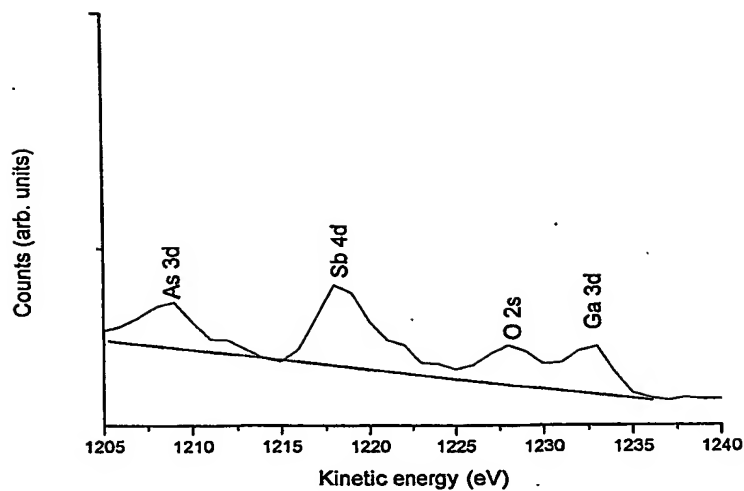
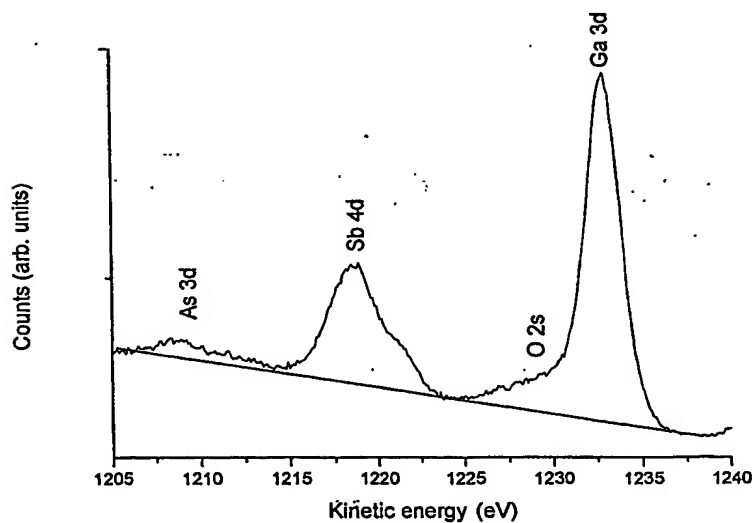
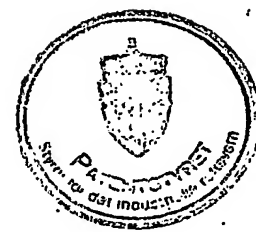


Figure 10. XPS spectra of $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) after etch with etchant with 0.18 M HF



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Figure 11. XPS spectra of $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) after etch with etchant with 0.9 M HF



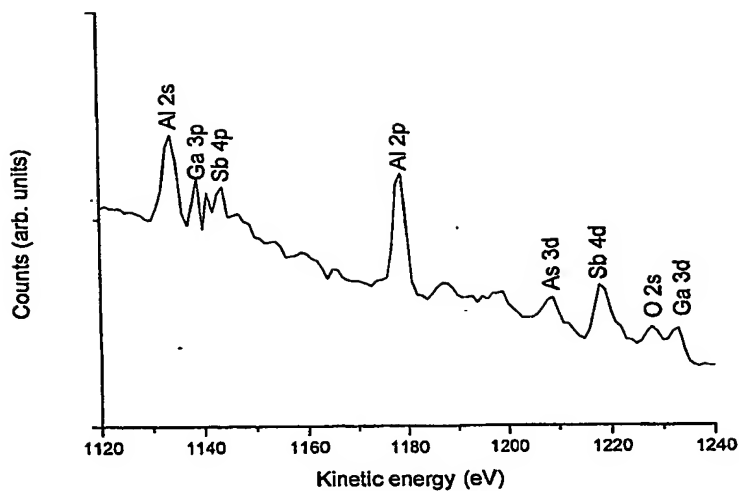


Figure 12. XPS spectra of $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) after etch with etchant with 0.18 M HF. Al-peak in spectrum shows residue Al oxide on the remaining GaSb substrate after etch.

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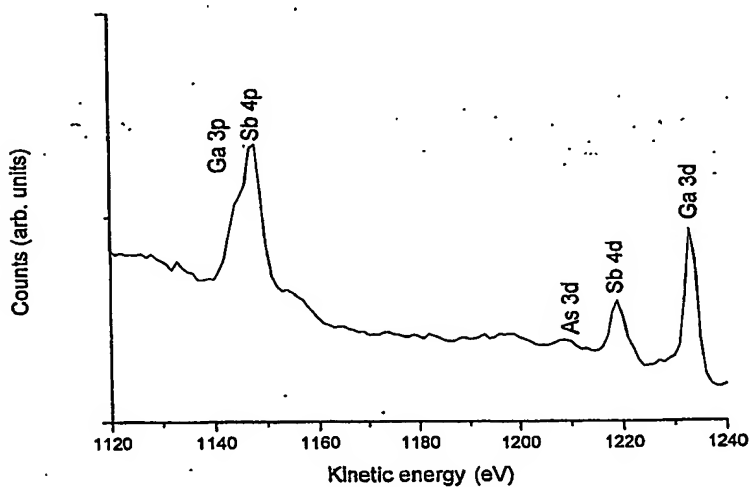


Figure 13. XPS spectra of $\text{Al}_{0.90}\text{Ga}_{0.10}\text{AsSb}$ (lattice matched to GaSb) after etch with etchant with 0.9 M HF. No Al-peak from the remaining GaSb substrate can be seen, but some As and O signal is present (see figure 11).

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